

THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED (5)

(Note from the Editor: Chapters 4 and 5 have inadvertently been published ahead of chapter 3, which follows below. The coherence of the articles is little affected by the order, since each subject is mainly self-contained.)

CHAPTER 3

Gifts bestowed by the ascended Lord on His Church

Quoting from Psalm 68:18, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore He says, Having ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men... and *He* has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers" (Eph. 4:8,11).

We are told that the saints are "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner-stone" (Eph. 2:20).

Christ has the supreme place

The supreme place of Christ must be diligently upheld. He gives character to the Church. It was upon the confession of His Person that the Lord would build His Assembly. The apostle Peter, quoting the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a corner stone," goes on to say, "To you therefore who believe [is] the preciousness" (1 Pet. 2:6,7). Once the eye is off Christ, the key to everything is lost.

If our earth got out of right relation to the sun, disaster untold would be the inevitable result. So it is with Christ and His Assembly.

The figure of the Church as the body of Christ emphasizes this. Of what use is the body without the head? The head is vital to the body, that is clear enough.

The remedy for the assembly troubles in Colosse lay in holding the Head. That would deliver them from "philosophy and vain deceit" (modernism) on the one hand, and occupation with ordinances — "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (ritualism) on the other. Holding the Head is surely looking to the Lord in glory for sustainment and direction, keeping in fellowship with Him.

Once an old Christian said, "Brethren, if we hold the Head we shall hold each other." And so it is; all denominations and many divisions are only the fruits of not holding the Head.

The apostles and prophets

The apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the Assembly. They clearly held an important and unique position. It was theirs to introduce Christianity into the world. For this a certain qualification was necessary.

When Peter proposed to choose an apostle to take the place rendered vacant by the death of Judas Iscariot, he stressed that from among those who had "assembled with us all [the] time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these should be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Then the apostles asked the Lord to point out him whom was chosen by Him. "And they gave lots on them, and the lot fell on Matthias."

The call of the Apostle Paul was unique to himself and was based on different criteria. His life's work for the Lord and his ministry were distinctively his and extremely important. The wisdom of God is clearly seen in this.

Paul had seen a light above the brightness of the sun. He had seen the Lord, and had heard the Lord's own voice from heaven. These things had most suitably prepared him to be a powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord. Later he was caught up to the third heaven and saw and heard the Lord. Had any one else such apostolic credentials?

A definition of a gift

The best definition that comes to mind is: "A gift is the expression of an impression." What a deep impression must have been made on the apostles' minds as they journeyed with the Lord during those memorable three and a half years, and as they witnessed His atoning death. And then how deeply must it have impressed them when the verity of the resurrection of Christ was forced upon their unbelieving minds.

It was like the laying of a cold fire. And then, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit lit the fire, and the apostolic testimony blazed forth.

What a deep impression was made upon Saul of Tarsus on that memorable journey to Damascus, when he was chosen to be a minister and witness "both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in" (Acts 26:16).

Moreover, the ability was given him to express what had been impressed. Besides this, the fulness of the gospel and the teaching as to the Assembly of God in all its aspects was revealed to him. More was communicated to the Apostle Paul than to any of the others. Each was filled and furnished for his particular task.

The Acts of the Apostles in the main confines its narrations to the ministries of the apostles Peter and Paul, more particularly of the latter. The Epistles bring out the doctrines. Thus the foundation was laid. The prophets are associated with the apostles in the laying of the foundation. We gather from 1 Corinthians 14 the important position they held in the Christian assemblies. A prophet is one who reveals the mind of God in a special way for the moment. A popular notion is that prophesying is foretelling future events, but this is only a part of a prophet's work, and may even be wanting altogether as it did in some cases. Rather, New Testament prophesying is marked by speaking "to men [in] edification, and encouragement, and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3).

In Acts 21:9 we read of Philip's four daughters who prophesied. It is clear that if the Holy Spirit energized them in this service, it would certainly not be done in disobedience to the Holy Spirit's own teaching: "But I do not suffer a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over man, but to be in quietness" (1 Tim. 2:12). Philip's daughters could prophesy among women in sisterly modesty; this we know from Titus 2:3-5. In no way does their action justify the present-day forwardness that some consider acceptable today.

Two points must be emphasized. In the first place, the gifts come from God, not from man. Graduation from a seminary, theological college, or Bible School does not impart a gift to anyone. Gifts must be *divinely* given. "All these things operates the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular according as He pleases" (1 Cor. 12:11). And secondly, we believe that in the early days of the Church there was such a mighty action of the Spirit of God, that these persons had power and grace in a fulness that made the gifts bestowed upon them operative to the full. Nowadays thousands take positions in the professing church (ordained by their fellow men) who have little or no qualifications for the work they seek to do; frequently these men are not even converted.

Apostolic succession an empty claim.

The Scriptures give no instructions for the carrying on of the apostolic office from generation to generation as was the case with the high priesthood in Israel. On the contrary, the apostles and prophets are said to have laid the foundation. A foundation is laid once and for all. One might as sensibly speak of the foundation of a building being carried up story by story to the roof as to speak of apostolic succession. Neither the apostles nor the prophets had successors — they only laid the foundation.

It is true that the apostle Paul deputed Timothy and Titus to appoint elders in connection with their spheres of service, but there was no hint of these having authority to appoint others in succession.

The circumstances of the apostolic ministry

The only Scriptures in existence on the day of Pentecost were those of the Old Testament. Manuscript copies of these were rare and mostly confined to the synagogues, and reading was the accomplishment of the learned few.

Suppose a town with a synagogue in it; there the Jews assembled who were banded together in bitter rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. Outside the synagogue reigned pagan darkness. Heathen temples abounded with their horrid rites. Into this city came two men, apostles of the Christian faith.

Now the preaching of the cross is "to Jews an offence, and to nations foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23), for the natural man cannot understand the things of God, "because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

These apostles had no book embodying the Christian teaching, as we have today in the New Testament. Their message was absolutely revolutionary. "These [men] that have set the world in tumult, are come here also," was the cry of the fanatical Jews at Thessalonica. The apostle's message came indeed as a death blow to both anti-Christian Judaism and dark paganism.

No wonder it needed *power*, the mighty power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, to reach, to regenerate, and to save men, and to bring them into what was very new and opposed to all the thoughts of men: into the Church of God.

And further, the only idea the young converts could gain of how Christianity could change men's lives was to be seen in the lives of those who brought the message. So the apostle Paul could say, "I entreat you therefore, be my imitators" (1 Cor. 4:16). Would that be modest language for a servant of Christ to employ today? And yet surely it was right for the apostle Paul to use it, and he used it with a deep sense of the grace of God. The Corinthian believers were inhabitants of a city that had become proverbial for its dissolute wickedness, for when a youth was drawn into evil, he was said to be "Corinthianized." The Corinthian believers were dependent upon the example of the apostle's life to learn what practical Christianity meant. Along similar lines Paul could say to Timothy, "*Thou* hast been thoroughly acquainted with my teaching, conduct..." (2 Tim. 3:10).

In every respect the apostles and prophets occupied a very special place for which they received special grace. Now their work is done; the foundation has been laid.

Evangelists

An evangelist is characterized by his very name, he is the bearer of God's good news, the gospel of God's grace. Scripture tells us very little about evangelists. Philip is the only one who is called by that name (Acts 21:8).

One cannot pretend to be an evangelist. The ascended Lord bestows this gift upon the evangelist, thereby enabling him to bring the gospel to those whom he meets. An evangelist cares for men's souls. He will do his utmost to reach others with the gospel. He is a man of energy, initiative, prayerfulness, and zeal. He is moved by a divine compassion for the lost.

The world is the sphere of the evangelist. "Go into all the world, and preach the glad tidings to all the creation" (Mk. 16:15). This verse indicates the sphere of his operations and also the constancy of his task. Men with this calling have crossed the seas; amid heathen and cannibal races they have preached the subduing gospel of the grace of God.

It is significant that the evangelist doesn't lead the list of gifts, but follows after the apostles and prophets. After the Church was formed on the day of Pentecost, the apostles and prophets were used to spread it beyond Jerusalem. Assemblies were formed in various countries, as we have recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Why is the evangelist not listed first? One might contend that his parish is the world. Surely, converts are the first necessity. Yes, that is so, and the Lord Himself gathered the first converts during His ministry on earth. These formed the early Church on the day of Pentecost, and on that day it was an apostle whose one sermon was used to convert 3000 souls. Why then does the evangelist come third on the list? There must be a reason.

An illustration may help. If a person wishes to keep bees, what would his first step be? Would he first get a swarm of bees, or purchase a beehive? If he first got a swarm of bees and had no beehive, where would he put his bees? Obviously, his first concern would be to buy a beehive, and then when he got the bees he would have a suitable place for them.

An evangelist must be true to the Assembly

God acts in a similar way. The apostles and prophets (just to carry the illustration a little further) made the beehive. In other words, they were used for the formation of the Church of God upon earth. Their work provided the place where the converts could be brought to, cared for, and nourished.

During a period of highly unseasonable frost which made havoc of the fruit blossoms late in April, I once saw two little thrushes more dead than alive in a park. Having wandered from the nest these two birds were likely to perish in the cold.

So it is with young converts, they too are helpless. How good that the evangelist has the Assembly where he can introduce his converts, and where they can be nurtured in the things of the Lord. It has been said that the evangelist should be like a draftsman's compass, which consists of a fixed and a free leg. The fixed leg remains stationary in the centre of the circle, whereas the free leg reaches out as far as it can, taking as wide a sweep as its length will permit.

So every evangelist should be loyal to the assembly, presenting the truth concerning the Assembly and its principles a proper place in his message. Meanwhile he himself should be true to that place and, as led of the Lord, go out from there into the world, exercising his gift and finding converts, and to bring these converts to the centre from which he works.

The evangelist is responsible to the Lord.

The evangelist is not under the control or guidance of the assembly, but he is under the guidance and control of the Lord, and he should not count in vain on the fellowship of his brethren.

If, however, the evangelist contravenes the truth of God in carrying on his work, his brethren should seek to recover him from wrong methods or ways. If these are sufficiently serious, and persisted in, it would be the duty of the assembly to refuse fellowship with him in his work. Meanwhile there is to be much room for love and forbearance: "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). The spirit of this verse ought to be evident when dealing with each other in matters of this kind.

Pastors and teachers

The very words chosen to express the character of these gifts go far to explain them. "Pastor" is the same word which elsewhere in the Scriptures is translated "shepherd." Teacher suggests the thought of a schoolmaster, an instructor.

The pastor or shepherd cares for the sheep; he will protect them, and look after them when they are sick or feeble. Isn't the Good Shepherd in John 10 a beautiful model of a pastor? Of course, the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep, and His death was an atoning death. This stands by itself — His death alone was an atoning death. But in every other way the Lord stands as a model of the pastor or shepherd. Indeed the apostle Peter, while speaking of the Lord as the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), sees the pastors as under-shepherds.

The teacher's task on the other hand is to instruct. It is his delightful work to expound the Word of God to God's people. How necessary is his work. How much we need to have a true knowledge of the Word — of the gospel, of the Church, of the history of the Israelites, of the dispensations, of the Lord's coming again, and of prophecy. Besides these, there is the moral bearing of the Word on our lives and ways, and also the revelation of God as Father, and of the Lord Himself. And then there is still the truth that subjectively is connected with the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Gifts are for the whole Church

A gift is a gift wherever he finds himself. A gift is not localized, but wherever the pastor or teacher finds himself he can exercise his gift. And so an evangelist is an evangelist wherever he is, and he is certainly free to use his gift wherever he is led of the Lord.

Gifts cannot be manufactured by official ordination. The only ordination that counts is "the ordination of the pierced hands."

To be cont'd

V. Prerequisites for a relationship between fallen man and a holy God

A. From God's side

1. His majesty and honour, which have been offended, must first be glorified — Gen. 3:1-6
2. His righteousness in relationship to the sins and sin (i.e. the nature) of man must be satisfied — 1 Jn. 1:5; Rom. 8:3; Hab. 1:13

B. From man's side

1. He must receive a new nature that is not sinful and that desires to have fellowship with God, because it loves God and acknowledges His rights — Jn. 2:23-Jn. 3:6; Gen. 6:5-7; 1 Jn.1:5
2. His wicked, hostile nature must be done away — Col. 3:9-10
3. His sins must be forgiven — Rom. 3:19

VI. How are these prerequisites satisfied?

A. From God's side

1. Through the work of the Lord Jesus, God is completely satisfied regarding sin and sins — 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 2:24, Heb. 10:12-18
2. God has been completely glorified through the work on the cross and the manner in which this has been accomplished — Jn. 13:31
3. On the basis of this work God can be merciful 2 Cor. 5:18-21

B. From man's side

1. Conversion

a. Why are conversion and new birth essential?

- i. God is absolutely holy and man completely lost — 1 Pe. 1:16
- ii. For this, a person must repent and receive a new life — Acts 17:30; Jn. 3:3

b. What is conversion?

- i. It is not just repentance over a certain (wrong) deed or thought — Mt. 21:29,32; 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21
- ii. It is an inner change, a repentant judging of the evil Mt. 3:12; 11:21; Lk. 15:7,10; Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:5.
- iii. It involves a turning about — Mt. 13:15; Acts 11:18,21; 15:3; 2 Cor. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:25

2. Faith

a. What place has faith in conversion? — Rom. 1:5; Acts 11:21; 17:30

3. The believer and repentance 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:5; Jas. 5:19,20; Lk. 22:32

VII. What is New Birth?

A. To be born again — Jn. 3:1-8

1. Born anew, of an entirely new source and beginning of life — :3
2. Born out of water and Spirit — :5; 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18

B. To be born of God — in. 1:13; 1 in. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18

VIII. Justification

A. Justified by faith — Rom. 3:28,30; 4:23-25; 5:1; Gal. 3:8,24

1. Justified by works — Jas. 2:14-26

B. Justified by His blood — Rom. 5:9; 3:25

C. Justified by His grace — Ti. 3:7

D. Justified from sin — Rom. 6:7

E. Justified freely — Rom. 3:24

F. Justification of life — Rom. 5:18

G. Peace with God — Rom. 4:24-5:2; Eph. 2:17; Col. 1:20-21

H. Peace of God — Phil. 4:7

I. The peace the Son of God gives — Jn. 14:27

J. The God of peace — Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20

K. Peace with other children of God — Eph. 2:14-19

IX. Deliverance

A. Delivered from the law — Rom. 7: 1-6

B. Delivered from sin — Rom. 6:18,22

C. Delivered by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus — Rom 8:2

D. Delivered by the truth — Jn. 8:32,36

E. Delivered from the world — Gal. 1:4

To be cont'd

OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (38)

79. ELIJAH TAKEN INTO HEAVEN. THE FIRST MIRACLES OF ELISHA. — 2 Kings 1-2

Outline

1. Elijah and Ahaziah 2 Ki. 1
2. Elijah Taken Up into Heaven 2 Ki. 2:1-18
3. Elisha's First Actions 2 Ki. 2:19-25

Explanation

1. Ahaziah preferred Satan above Jehovah, and sent to ask Baal-zebub (lord of the flies) for advice. In this action Elijah is a type of the remnant spoken of in Revelation 11:5. Believers in this dispensation of grace must know of what spirit they are (Lk. 9:52-56).

2. Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal to Bethel and then to Jericho. Finally Elijah went across the Jordan.

3. Elisha asked as it were for the inheritance of a firstborn son (Dt. 21:17).

Lesson

On Mount Carmel fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, thereby allowing the people to go out free. This time fire came down from heaven and consumed Ahaziah's messengers. On Mount Carmel grace was shown, here judgment.

At Gilgal the reproach of Egypt was rolled away (Josh. 5:9). Bethel first spoke of God's blessing promised to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15), but had become the seat of idolatry (1 Ki. 12:32-33). Jericho was the city upon which a curse rested, yet it had been rebuilt in Ahab's days (Josh. 6:26; 1 Ki. 16:34). Jordan speaks of death.

Elijah's translation is a picture of the rapture of the believers (1 Th. 4:17).

Just as Elisha received the mantle of Elijah, so believers receive the power of the Spirit when their eyes are fixed upon the Lord Jesus in heaven.

80. FURTHER MIRACLES OF ELISHA. — 2 Kings 3, 4, 6:1-7

Outline

1. The Battle Against Moab 2 Ki. 3
2. The Vessels of the Widow 2 Ki. 4:1-7
3. Elisha and the Shunammite Woman 2 Ki. 4:8-17
4. The Death and Resurrection of her Son 2 Ki. 4:18-37
5. Other Miracles 2 Ki. 4:38-41, 42-44; 6:1-7

Explanation

1. Jehoshaphat allied himself with Jehoram, King of Israel, as he had once done with Ahab. And as before, he came into dire trouble. Through Elisha the Lord gave deliverance and victory over Moab.

2. The widow woman did not cry in vain for help. Elisha told her what to do. When she had filled all the vessels, she returned to Elisha for further advice.
3. Elisha used the power conferred upon him for the well-being of others, for himself he kept nothing. He was poor, yet he made many rich; he was a real type of the Lord (Mt. 8:20; 2 Cor. 8:9). The devout Shunammite and her household were richly blessed for showing hospitality to Elisha (Heb. 13:2).
4. The Lord used her suffering to glorify Himself. At first she saw the power of life (in the birth of her son) and then the power of resurrection.
5. As a type of the Lord Jesus, Elisha multiplied the food so that all ate and had to spare. He also caused the iron axe-head to swim.

Lesson

Jehoshaphat's experiences contain a solemn lesson for us. It is not pleasing to the Lord when we join ourselves to those who do not follow the Lord, even if the purpose for which we do so is honourable in itself. "If we are unfaithful, He abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

The grace and help of Jehovah is according to the measure of faith (compare Abraham's supplication in Gen. 18:23-33; Mt. 8:13). The Lord not only takes care of the payment of the debt, but also provides over and above what is necessary (Eph. 3:20-21).

In the staff (the law of Moses) there was no power (v.31) only in the death and resurrection of the Lord is there power for us, by grace. (Elisha made himself one with the dead boy and lay upon him, just as Christ made Himself one with us in His death). After death comes resurrection, for us first spiritually and then physically (Jn. 5:25, 28-29; 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

To be cont'd

THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER (5)

— J. Rouw

Thus far we have covered three cases: those of Moses, Elijah, and the demoniac. Now we want to look at the account of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in John 11. In verse 1 we read: "Now there was a certain [man] sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and Martha her sister." And in verse 3: "The sisters therefore sent to Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." And did the Lord go to heal him? No, we don't read that He did. "When Jesus heard [it], He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He heard, He is sick, He remained two days then in the place where He was." He did not come! He didn't answer their prayer. It was a most critical situation! Someone was about to die and the Lord Jesus simply didn't do a thing about it. He is the Mighty One. He could have said: "Go home, from this moment on he will be better." The Lord had done so several times before. But here He didn't do it. Why not? The Lord Jesus said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." I wonder how Martha and Mary took it when they heard that message.

The Lord Jesus waited four more days; two days He remained where He was, and then the journey took another two days. Meanwhile Lazarus had died and lay already four days in the grave. When the Lord Jesus finally arrived and the stone was to be rolled away, Martha objected, "Lord, he stinks already." Decay had already set in. The Lord Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Once before He had raised a twelve year old girl from the dead, and also a young man. That girl had just died, the young man was on his way to the grave. Then the Lord had touched the bier with the words, "Youth, I say to thee, Wake up." But here it was an adult who had been four days in the grave. And still, the Lord, when He had come to the grave, called out loud, "Lazarus, come forth. And the dead came forth, bound feet and hands with graveclothes."

Now I like to ask a question: Why do you think the Lord Jesus called, "Lazarus, come forth"? Why did He call him by name? Well, here is the answer. One day, and it may be soon, the Lord Jesus will call, "Come forth." Then all the dead will rise. That's how mighty He is. Here only Lazarus had to be raised. Therefore He said, "Lazarus, come forth." It gives us just a

glimpse of the omnipotence of the Son of God. What a mighty Saviour He is. All who are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall go forth (Jn. 5). But here only Lazarus rose.

Now you realize why the Lord Jesus didn't say immediately, as so often before, "Just go home, he is better already." Now the miracle was infinitely greater. The glory, the majesty of the Son of God radiated forth in all its brilliance. Hadn't it happened in this way, they never would have seen the greatness of the Lord Jesus in such a marvelous way, and neither would we.

To be cont'd

A SEED OF GOD (5)

—A. E. Bouter

Review

Thus far we have seen that when Scripture speaks of seed, it does so first in relation to plants (agriculture, botany) and secondly with regard to man and mankind. But we also saw how, besides this literal reference to the natural world, it applies the idea of "seed" to a new order of life which God has introduced in the Lord Jesus. We also saw how this life of Christ is reproduced in a new generation to which, through the grace of God, we may belong today.

Outline

To help our studies on a seed of God along, we might, without any pretention of being complete, give the following outline, accentuating the spiritual meaning of seed:

- o Seed contains a concept, a God-given, definite PLAN. This is so in the natural as well as in the spiritual world. All develops according to the counsel of Him who is the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, triune God. He is its Designer (1 Cor. 15:38). There simply is no room for evolution of the species, natural selection, survival of the fittest, or any such notions.
- o It contains a PROGRAM to be carried out, step by step, according to God's master plan (Gen. 1:11f; Mark 4:28; Heb. 1:20;
- o It contains a PURPOSE, which in the end will be seen to be for God's glory (Col. 1:16, Rev. 4:11).
- o And it contains POWER. This is displayed under the adverse circumstances in a hostile world. A little seed is able to split a rock! We hope to dwell on this when considering the SPROUT. This aspect is especially seen in God's resurrection-power (Eph. 1:18ff). In this connection it is remarkable that God introduced the life of seeds, plants and fruit on the third day, which speaks of "resurrection" throughout the Bible. This can for instance be seen in John 20:22 and Colossians 3:3f.
- o Then there is the PRODUCT of the seed, the fruit, which is "after its kind." It is the result of a rather painful process. Through death the seed REPRODUCES (comp. Jn. 12:24; 1 John 3:9).
- o This leads to the thought of PROCREATION and PROGENY in view of the world to come (1 Cor. 15), for which there is a need of FAITH now (Heb. 11). The seed's POSTERITY is a new generation with Christ as its Head (Rom. 5).
- o In this long PROCESS there is also the thought of PROGRESS. This theme is seen in the Lord's life as a Man on earth. Now it is being developed in the Christian, by the process that brings the new life to Christ-like maturity, individually as well as collectively (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 4:16 and many other passages).
- o Another theme we will find while considering "the seed" is the ABUNDANCE OF LIFE. This is displayed especially in the POMEGRANATE, which contains a profusion of seeds. It speaks of FRUITFULNESS.
- o Although the principle of "after its kind" is rigidly maintained, there is no mere repetition with God; to the contrary, there is an astonishing richness of variation, diversity and variety.

- o God in His wisdom has also given a PATTERN of successive phases through which the process from seed to fruit passes. This begins with sowing and continues right through to the procuring of the fruit, the harvesting (Gen. 8:22; 1 Cor. 3:6, 15:43; Is. 28:23-29).
- o In the New Testament, especially in the parables, we find seed mentioned in connection with the power of the WORD and of the Holy Spirit.
- o Finally, seed and its fruit are used as FOOD for the Christian. It FORMS us after Christ, so that His characteristics may be reproduced in us. It also SUSTAINS the new life which has been given us; this we see for example in John 6:54ff and Revelation 22:2.

These few thoughts display once more the vastness of the subject we have before us.

To be cont'd

THE NATIONS IN PROPHECY

— R. Been Sr.

"When the Most High assigned to the nations their inheritance... He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" (Dt. 32:8; see also Acts 17:26).

God determined which nations would live around Israel. Because these nations have been much in contact with Israel, the Scriptures speak about them, diagnosing their character and recording their future. When Israel was faithful to God, it was a good testimony for those nations and it remained itself separated. When Israel was unfaithful, it came under the influence of those nations, who were then used by God as a rod of discipline for Israel. It is important to note that the various characters of Israel's neighbours signify to us the world in its various aspects. We know from Scripture how sad Israel's history is. Similarly Christendom has come all too much under the influence of the world as well.

Syria (Damascus) Hostility against God's plans.	Babel Organized, corrupting, religious system.	Assyria (Nineveh) Brute force against God, despising His people.
Tyre Trade and proud arrogance.	Israel (literally) Assembly of God (figuratively) The believer in Christ (figuratively)	Moab and Ammon Pride and ease.
Philistines		
Egypt Independence and own wisdom, conceit.		Edom (Esau, Seir, Duma) Hatred and mockery against God and His people.

Israel, delivered from Egypt (as a picture of the world), was surrounded by the world in its various forms. Therefore it was most important how Israel behaved itself. And so it is with the Church (the Assembly of God) and the individual believer in Christ. The unfaithfulness of the Assembly does not render the individual's responsibility for personal faithfulness void.

Egypt

A picture of the world, characterized by its independence from God, its own wisdom, and its arrogance.

The spirit of Egypt becomes evident through the words: "Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which saith, My river is mine own, and I made it for myself" (Ezek. 29:3,9). Through artful waterworks the Nile had been made to render Egypt fertile, so that it appeared that the country had no need of the blessings from heaven, of the enriching rains (Dt. 11:10).

Egypt seeks its livelihood in its own resources, technical knowledge, and ability. It is a picture of the world in its independence from God, which is fed by its own wisdom. Although in Joseph's days God had seriously put this

independent spirit to shame through the seven years of hunger (likely from the low water level of the Nile), Egypt has not given up its spirit of independence.

Israel, though delivered out of Egypt, has never freed itself from the influence of that country. Just think of their setting up the golden calf, an Egyptian idol, and of the longing of the murmuring Israelites in the wilderness for Egyptian fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic (Num. 11:5). Ever again both the ten-tribe nation and Judah looked for help from Egypt, though it was nothing more than a reed, which, when one leaned on it, broke and wounded the hand.

And so it has been with Christendom. Even the individual believer is ever in danger of being independent from God, of trusting his own knowledge and ability, of seeking his own resources, his own wisdom, and own strength. These have always been great attractions for man. Only by looking continuously upward, by living in dependence upon God, can the believer be kept from this type of spirit.

Babel

An organized, corrupting, religious system, imposed by force.

Babel's founder was Nimrod, the first despot on earth, full of oppression. The building of the tower of Babel points to its organization which turned itself against God. Babel always wants things differently than God wants them. In the Babylonian system the world is linked to religion.

In Nebuchadnezzar the despotism of Nimrod comes again to the fore. In his image in the valley of Dura, we see how Babel's religion is linked to human art and culture.

Babel caused the nations to be mad and stupefied (Jer. 51:7). Even Israel was all too much under its influence. A Babylonian mantle brought judgment in the midst of Israel's army (Josh. 7:4-9,21). King Hezekiah proved himself to be under its influence when he showed the Babylonian ambassadors all his treasures and armour (Isa. 39:2).

The Babylonian system, linked with its religion, satisfies the desires of the flesh, which wants what is before its eyes. It gratifies the pursuit of grandeur in this life.

The two tribes were taken captive to Babylon. Unfaithful Christendom too has made a friendly league with the Babylonian system and has become entirely pervaded by its influence. It lives there where the throne of Satan is. It opposes the plans of God. It is drunk with the blood of faithful believers (Rev. 17 and 18). The time will come when that system, which is Christian in name only, will be dissolved into the mystical Babylonian system.

True believers should keep aloof of this system that is so hostile to God and separate themselves from it. Daniel and others remained faithful in the midst of the Babylonian influences.

Babylon doesn't acknowledge the ruin in the church, the assembly. It is rich, lacking nothing. Its ambition and its power are tremendous and are only held in check by the notions of modern times. In a little while, however, the Babylonian system will rule the "beast," the restored Roman Empire (Rev. 17:3).

Assyria

Brute force against God and His people, full of contempt.

Assyria was a lion among the nations and Nineveh a lion's den (Nah. 2:11-12). A nation of steel, of military violence, that did know neither grace nor forgiveness. This was demonstrated by the spirit in which Sennacherib and Rabshakeh spoke (2 Ki. 18).

How proud was the Assyrian of what he had achieved by military means. How absolutely void of any awareness that God was only using him as His rod of discipline. How did he demonstrate his contempt for God and His people by boasting of his achievements. His purpose was to drive Israel from Palestine.

King Ahaz asked Assyria for military help and precisely thereby he brought the enemy of God and His nation into the land of Judah.

And thus in the time of the end, the prophetic Assyrian, the King of the North, will rave and rant against the Lord's people.

Christendom too has often looked for help from those in power in this world. Unfortunately it ever led to the sword settling spiritual matters. As a result force and violence pressed their way into Christendom. After all, the world never does anything for free. It doesn't give as the Lord Jesus does, but it demands something in return.

Tyre

Trade and proud self-exaltation (Isa. 23:1-5).

Under the governments of David and Solomon, Tyre had a special relationship to God and His people through Hiram. Trade, which ought to be the channel between producer and consumer, has been used by Tyre to strengthen its own power base (Ezek. 26-28), to draw this earth's treasures to itself, and to exalt itself as a god. Through this, its king has become a picture of Satan in his pride and his fall (Ezek. 28:12-16). Trade is the god of Tyre.

The spirit of Tyre has done much damage in Christendom too. Many believers demonstrate the spirit of Tyre in their pursuit of trade, money, and power.

Syria (Damascus)

Hostility against God's plans.

Pekah, the king of ten-tribe Israel, allied himself to Syria to subject Judah, his brother nation, and to annihilate the house of David (Isa. 7:1-9). But its only result was that Damascus subjected Israel to its own plans. When the world enters into a friendship's treaty, it will always turn itself against God's plans, and in the end the believers lose out.

Moab and Ammon

The world in its arrogance (Isa. 16:6) and ease (Jer. 48:11,29).

Moab has never gone into exile. Good wine improves through rest; bad wine sours. So it was with Moab, the rest caused it to become increasingly worse, and finally its pride reached its pinnacle. How often must God allow deep suffering over believers to keep them from pride.

Edom (Esau, also referred to as Seir or Duma)

The world in its irreconcilable hatred against God and His people.

Edom considered itself safe in its mountain strongholds (Jer. 49:16). When Jerusalem fell, there was joy in Edom. From Seir comes the mocking call: "Watchman, what of the night?" As answer comes the message that for God's people the "morning" is coming, but for the mockers the "night." Edom has nothing to look forward to, it will be done away. The world mocks about the promises and the warnings of the Lord.

The Philistines

The enemies in the land.

Through the unfaithfulness of Israel the Philistines had remained in the country. Often they ruled over Israel. Whenever Israel resigned itself to this fact, there was peace and rest, but the Philistines did not allow the least bit of opposition.

In Christendom there also rules a "Philistine." And when there is a returning to the truth of Scripture, the "Philistine" shows its anger and the battle is on.

Once, the men of Judah shied from the battle against the Philistines, then they were ready to deliver Samson to them (Jud. 15:11). But it is better to fight the battle against the "Philistines" and to stand for the truth of the Lord.

Conclusion

And so Israel was surrounded by the nations who by their corrupting influences were an ever present danger for the Lord's people. For the believers of today it isn't any different. Only by fearing God, and keeping His word is it possible to remain separated from such "neighbours."

"Because all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing, and its lust, but he that does the will of God abides for eternity" (1 Jn. 2:16-17).

Note how Scripture says, "All that is in the world"; there is nothing in this system that is not at enmity with God and His people.

To be cont'd